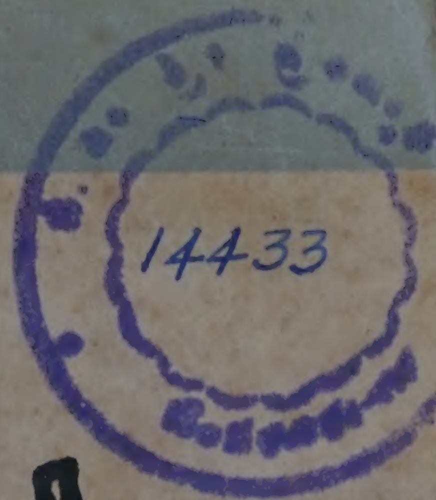
E. M. Forster

Howards End


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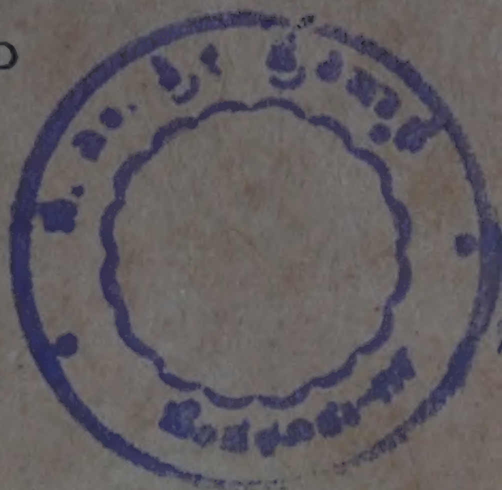
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HOWARDS END

E. M. FORSTER





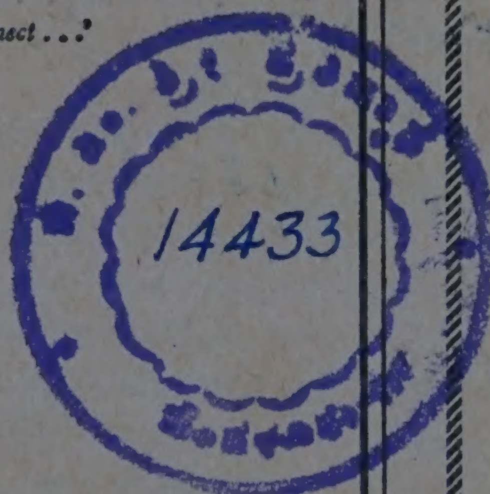
E. M. Forster, an all-too-reticent novelist, has gained his extraordinarily high reputation with remarkably few books. In *A Passage to India* he has given us indeed – to quote Lowes Dickinson – 'a classic on the strange and tragic fact of history and life called India'; but beyond that we have had but few novels, some short stories and prefaces, a wise and charming book on *Aspects of the Novel*, and two volumes of collected essays. Perhaps Mr Forster's personality, rather than his stories or his people, accounts for the fact that his public never seems to forget him, though it would be strange if readers of *Howards End*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *The Longest Journey*, *Abinger Harvest*, or *A Room with a View* could forget this writer who is one of our assets and is likely to become one of our glories.' He is one of those rare authors whose books are kept and re-read, not only for their stories, but for the wise sayings which crowd their pages and the gentle humanist philosophy which they reveal. His most recent book is *Marianne Thornton, a Domestic Biography* (1956). *A Passage to India* has recently been dramatized and successfully produced in London.

Cover illustration by David Gentleman

Howards End

E. M. FORSTER

'Only connect . . .'


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Penguin Books
HARMONDSWORTH
MIDDLESEX

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex
AUSTRALIA: Penguin Books Pty Ltd, 762 Whitehorse Road, Mitcham, Victoria

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First published 1910
Published in Penguin Books 1941
Reprinted 1941, 1943, 1950, 1953, 1957, 1960, 1961

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Made and printed in Great Britain
by C. Nicholls & Company Ltd

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CHAPTER I

ONE may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister.

Howards End,
Tuesday.

Dearest Meg,

It isn't going to be what we expected. It is old and little, and altogether delightful – red brick. We can scarcely pack in as it is, and the dear knows what will happen when Paul (younger son) arrives to-morrow. From hall you go right or left into dining-room or drawing-room. Hall itself is practically a room. You open another door in it, and there are the stairs going up in a sort of tunnel to the first-floor. Three bedrooms in a row there, and three attics in a row above. That isn't all the house really, but it's all that one notices – nine windows as you look up from the front garden.

Then there's a very big wych-elm – to the left as you look up – leaning a little over the house, and standing on the boundary between the garden and meadow. I quite love that tree already. Also ordinary elms, oaks – no nastier than ordinary oaks – pear-trees, apple-trees, and a vine. No silver birches, though. However, I must get on to my host and hostess. I only wanted to show that it isn't the least what we expected. Why did we settle that their house would be all gables and wiggles, and their garden all gamboge-coloured paths? I believe simply because we associate them with expensive hotels – Mrs Wilcox trailing in beautiful dresses down long corridors, Mr Wilcox bullying porters, etc. We females are that unjust.

I shall be back Saturday; will let you know train later. They are as angry as I am that you did not come too; really Tibby is too tiresome, he starts a new mortal disease every month. How could he have got hay fever in London? and even if he could, it seems hard that you should give up a visit to hear a schoolboy sneeze. Tell him that Charles Wilcox (the son who is here) has hay fever too, but he's brave, and gets quite cross when we inquire after it. Men like the Wilcoxes would do Tibby a power of good. But you won't agree, and I'd better change the subject.

This long letter is because I'm writing before breakfa
Oh, the beautiful vine leaves! The house is covered with a vine.
looked out earlier, and Mrs Wilcox was already in the garde
She evidently loves it. No wonder she sometimes looks tired. S
was watching the large red poppies come out. Then she walked
the lawn to the meadow, whose corner to the right I can just se
Trail, trail, went her long dress over the sopping grass, and s
came back with her hands full of the hay that was cut yesterday
I suppose for rabbits or something, as she kept on smelling it. T
air here is delicious. Later on I heard the noise of croquet ball
and looked out again, and it was Charles Wilcox practising; th
are keen on all games. Presently he started sneezing and had
stop. Then I hear more clicketing, and it is Mr Wilcox practisin
and then 'a-tissue, a-tissue': he has to stop too. Then Evie com
out, and does some calisthenic exercises on a machine that is tacke
on to a greengage-tree – they put everything to use – and then s
says 'a-tissue', and in she goes. And finally Mrs Wilcox r
appears, trail, trail, still smelling hay and looking at the flower
I inflict all this on you because once you said that life is sometim
life and sometimes only a drama, and one must learn to distingui
tother from which, and up to now I have always put that down
'Meg's clever nonsense'. But this morning, it really does see
not life but a play, and it did amuse me enormously to watch t
W's. Now Mrs Wilcox has come in.

I am going to wear [omission]. Last night Mrs Wilcox wo
an [omission], and Evie [omission]. So it isn't exactly a go-as-yo
please place, and if you shut your eyes it still seems the wiggly hot
that we expected. Not if you open them. The dog-roses are t
sweet. There is a great hedge of them over the lawn – magnificent
tall, so that they fall down in garlands, and nice and thin at t
bottom, so that you can see ducks through it and a cow. These belon
to the farm, which is the only house near us. There goes the breakfa
gong. Much love. Modified love to Tibby. Love to Aunt Jule
how good of her to come and keep you company, but what a bor
Burn this. Will write again Thursday.

Helen.

Howards End.

Friday.

Dearest Meg,

I am having a glorious time. I like them all. Mrs Wilcox, if quieter than in Germany, is sweeter than ever, and I never saw anything like her steady unselfishness, and the best of it is that the others do not take advantage of her. They are the very happiest, jolliest family that you can imagine. I do really feel that we are making friends. The fun of it is that they think me a noodle, and say so – at least, Mr Wilcox does – and when that happens, and one doesn't mind, it's a pretty sure test, isn't it? He says the most horrid things about women's suffrage so nicely, and when I said I believed in equality he just folded his arms and gave me such a setting down as I've never had. Meg, shall we ever learn to talk less? I never felt so ashamed of myself in my life. I couldn't point to a time when men had been equal, nor even to a time when the wish to be equal had made them happier in other ways. I couldn't say a word. I had just picked up the notion that equality is good from some book – probably from poetry, or you. Anyhow, it's been knocked into pieces, and, like all people who are really strong, Mr Wilcox did it without hurting me. On the other hand, I laugh at them for catching hay fever. We live like fighting-cocks, and Charles takes us out every day in the motor – a tomb with trees in it, a hermit's house, a wonderful road that was made by the Kings of Mercia – tennis – a cricket match – bridge – and at night we squeeze up in this lovely house. The whole clan's here now – it's like a rabbit warren. Evie is a dear. They want me to stop over Sunday – I suppose it won't matter if I do. Marvellous weather and the views marvellous – views westward to the high ground. Thank you for your letter. Burn this.

Your affectionate

Helen.

Howards End,

Sunday.

Dearest, Dearest Meg,

I do not know what you will say: Paul and I are in love – the younger son who only came here Wednesday.

CHAPTER II

MARGARET glanced at her sister's note and pushed it over the breakfast-table to her aunt. There was a moment's hush, and then the flood-gates opened.

'I can tell you nothing, Aunt Juley. I know no more than you do. We met – we only met the father and mother abroad last spring. I know so little that I didn't even know their son's name. It's all so – ' She waved her hand and laughed a little.

'In that case it is far too sudden.'

'Who knows, Aunt Juley, who knows?'

'But, Margaret dear, I mean, we mustn't be unpractical now that we've come to facts. It is too sudden, surely.'

'Who knows!'

'But, Margaret dear – '

'I'll go for her other letters,' said Margaret. 'No, I won't, I'll finish my breakfast. In fact, I haven't them. We met the Wilcoxes on an awful expedition that we made from Heidelberg to Speyer. Helen and I had got it into our heads that there was a grand old cathedral at Speyer – the Archbishop of Speyer was one of the seven electors – you know – "Speyer, Mainz, and Köln". Those three sees once commanded the Rhine Valley and got it the name of Priest Street.'

'I still feel quite uneasy about this business, Margaret.'

'The train crossed by a bridge of boats, and at first sight it looked quite fine. But oh, in five minutes we had seen the whole thing. The cathedral had been ruined, absolutely ruined, by restoration; not an inch left of the original structure. We wasted a whole day, and came across the Wilcoxes as we were eating our sandwiches in the public gardens. They too, poor things, had been taken in – they were actually stopping at Speyer – and they rather liked Helen insisting that they must fly with us to Heidelberg. As a matter of fact, they did come on next day. We all took some drives together. They knew us well enough to ask

Helen to come and see them – at least, I was asked too, but Tibby's illness prevented me, so last Monday she went alone. That's all. You know as much as I do now. It's a young man out of the unknown. She was to have come back Saturday, but put it off till Monday, perhaps on account of – I don't know.'

She broke off, and listened to the sounds of a London morning. Their house was in Wickham Place, and fairly quiet, for a lofty promontory of buildings separated it from the main thoroughfare. One had the sense of a backwater, or rather of an estuary, whose waters flowed in from the invisible sea, and ebbed into a profound silence while the waves without were still beating. Though the promontory consisted of flats – expensive, with cavernous entrance halls, full of concierges and palms – it fulfilled its purpose, and gained for the older houses opposite a certain measure of peace. These, too, would be swept away in time and another promontory would arise upon their site, as humanity piled itself higher and higher on the precious soil of London.

Mrs Munt had her own method of interpreting her nieces. She decided that Margaret was a little hysterical, and was trying to gain time by a torrent of talk. Feeling diplomatic, she lamented the fate of Speyer, and declared that never, never should she be so misguided as to visit it, and added of her own accord that the principles of restoration were ill understood in Germany. 'The Germans,' she said, 'are too thorough, and this is all very well sometimes, but at other times it does not do.'

'Exactly,' said Margaret; 'Germans are too thorough.' And her eyes began to shine.

'Of course I regard you Schlegels as English,' said Mrs Munt hastily – 'English to the backbone.'

Margaret leaned forward and stroked her hand.

'And that reminds me – Helen's letter – '

'Oh yes, Aunt Juley, I am thinking all right about Helen's letter. I know – I must go down and see her. I am thinking about her all right. I am meaning to go down.'

'But go with some plan,' said Mrs Munt, admitting into

her kindly voice a note of exasperation. 'Margaret, if I may interfere, don't be taken by surprise. What do you think of the Wilcoxes? Are they our sort? Are they likely people? Could they appreciate Helen, who is to my mind a very special sort of person? Do they care about Literature and Art? That is most important when you come to think of it. Literature and Art. Most important. How old would the son be? She says "younger son". Would he be in a position to marry? Is he likely to make Helen happy? Did you gather – ?'

'I gathered nothing.'

They began to talk at once.

'Then in that case – '

'In that case I can make no plans, don't you see.'

'On the contrary – '

'I hate plans. I hate lines of action. Helen isn't a baby.'

'Then in that case, my dear, why go down?'

Margaret was silent. If her aunt could not see why she must go down, she was not going to tell her. She was not going to say 'I love my dear sister; I must be near her at this crisis of her life.' The affections are more reticent than the passions, and their expression more subtle. If she herself should ever fall in love with a man, she, like Helen, would proclaim it from the house-tops, but as she only loved a sister she used the voiceless language of sympathy.

'I consider you odd girls,' continued Mrs Munt, 'and very wonderful girls, and in many ways far older than your years. But – you won't be offended? – frankly, I feel you are not up to this business. It requires an older person. Dear, I have nothing to call me back to Swanage.' She spread out her plump arms. 'I am all at your disposal. Let me go down to this house whose name I forget instead of you.'

'Aunt Juley' – she jumped up and kissed her – 'I must, must go to Howards End myself. You don't exactly understand, though I can never thank you properly for offering.'

'I do understand,' retorted Mrs Munt, with immense confidence. 'I go down in no spirit of interference, but to make inquiries. Inquiries are necessary. Now, I am going to be rude. You would say the wrong thing; to a certainty

you would. In your anxiety for Helen's happiness you would offend the whole of these Wilcoxes by asking one of your impetuous questions – not that one minds offending them.'

'I shall ask no questions. I have it in Helen's writing that she and a man are in love. There is no question to ask as long as she keeps to that. All the rest isn't worth a straw. A long engagement if you like, but inquiries, questions, plans, lines of action – no, Aunt Juley, no.'

Away she hurried, not beautiful, not supremely brilliant, but filled with something that took the place of both qualities – something best described as a profound vivacity, a continual and sincere response to all that she encountered in her path through life.

'If Helen had written the same to me about a shop-assistant or a penniless clerk –'

'Dear Margaret, do come into the library and shut the door. Your good maids are dusting the banisters.'

' – or if she had wanted to marry the man who calls for Carter Paterson, I should have said the same.' Then, with one of those turns that convinced her aunt that she was not mad really, and convinced observers of another type that she was not a barren theorist, she added: 'Though in the case of Carter Paterson I should want it to be a very long engagement indeed, I must say.'

'I should think so,' said Mrs Munt; 'and, indeed, I can scarcely follow you. Now, just imagine if you said anything of that sort to the Wilcoxes. I understand it, but most good people would think you mad. Imagine how disconcerting for Helen! What is wanted is a person who will go slowly, slowly in this business, and see how things are and where they are likely to lead to.'

Margaret was down on this.

'But you implied just now that the engagement must be broken off.'

'I think probably it must; but slowly.'

'Can you break an engagement off slowly?' Her eyes lit up. 'What's an engagement made of, do you suppose? I think it's made of some hard stuff, that may snap, but

can't break. It is different to the other ties of life. They stretch or bend. They admit of degree. They're different.'

'Exactly so. But won't you let me just run down to Howards House, and save you all the discomfort? I will really not interfere, but I do so thoroughly understand the kind of thing you Schlegels want that one quiet look round will be enough for me.'

Margaret again thanked her, again kissed her, and then ran upstairs to see her brother.

He was not so well.

The hay fever had worried him a good deal all night. His head ached, his eyes were wet, his mucous membrane, he informed her, in a most unsatisfactory condition. The only thing that made life worth living was the thought of Walter Savage Landor, from whose *Imaginary Conversations* she had promised to read at frequent intervals during the day.

It was rather difficult. Something must be done about Helen. She must be assured that it is not a criminal offence to love at first sight. A telegram to this effect would be cold and cryptic, a personal visit seemed each moment more impossible. Now the doctor arrived, and said that Tibby was quite bad. Might it really be best to accept Aunt Juley's kind offer, and to send her down to Howards End with a note?

Certainly Margaret was impulsive. She did swing rapidly from one decision to another. Running downstairs into the library, she cried: 'Yes, I have changed my mind; I do wish that you would go.'

There was a train from King's Cross at eleven. At half-past ten Tibby, with rare self-effacement, fell asleep, and Margaret was able to drive her aunt to the station.

'You will remember, Aunt Juley, not to be drawn into discussing the engagement. Give my letter to Helen, and say whatever you feel yourself, but do keep clear of the relatives. We have scarcely got their names straight yet, and, besides, that sort of thing is so uncivilized and wrong.'

'So uncivilized?' queried Mrs Munt, fearing that she was losing the point of some brilliant remark.

'Oh, I used an affected word. I only meant would you please only talk the thing over with Helen.'

'Only with Helen.'

'Because – ' But it was no moment to expound the personal nature of love. Even Margaret shrank from it, and contented herself with stroking her good aunt's hand, and with meditating, half sensibly and half poetically, on the journey that was about to begin from King's Cross.

Like many others who have lived long in a great capital, she had strong feelings about the various railway termini. They are our gates to the glorious and the unknown. Through them we pass out into adventure and sunshine, to them, alas! we return. In Paddington all Cornwall is latent and the remoter west; down the inclines of Liverpool Street lie fenlands and the illimitable Broads; Scotland is through the pylons of Euston; Wessex behind the poised chaos of Waterloo. Italians realize this, as is natural; those of them who are so unfortunate as to serve as waiters in Berlin call the Anhalt Bahnhof the Stazione d'Italia, because by it they must return to their homes. And he is a chilly Londoner who does not endow his stations with some personality, and extend to them, however shyly, the emotions of fear and love.

To Margaret – I hope that it will not set the reader against her – the station of King's Cross had always suggested Infinity. Its very situation – withdrawn a little behind the facile splendours of St Pancras – implied a comment on the materialism of life. Those two great arches, colourless, indifferent, shouldering between them an unlovely clock, were fit portals for some eternal adventure, whose issue might be prosperous, but would certainly not be expressed in the ordinary language of prosperity. If you think this ridiculous, remember that it is not Margaret who is telling you about it; and let me hasten to add that they were in plenty of time for the train; that Mrs Munt secured a comfortable seat, facing the engine, but not too near it; and that Margaret, on her return to Wickham Place, was confronted with the following telegram:

All over. Wish I had never written. Tell no one. – Helen.

But Aunt Juley was gone – gone irrevocably, and no power on earth could stop her.

CHAPTER III

MOST complacently did Mrs Munt rehearse her mission. Her nieces were independent young women, and it was not often that she was able to help them. Emily's daughters had never been quite like other girls. They had been left motherless when Tibby was born, when Helen was five and Margaret herself but thirteen. It was before the passing of the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, so Mrs Munt could without impropriety offer to go and keep house at Wickham Place. But her brother-in-law, who was peculiar and a German, had referred the question to Margaret, who with the crudity of youth had answered, 'No, they could manage much better alone.' Five years later Mr Schlegel had died too, and Mrs Munt had repeated her offer. Margaret, crude no longer, had been grateful and extremely nice, but the substance of her answer had been the same. 'I must not interfere a third time,' thought Mrs Munt. However, of course she did. She learnt, to her horror, that Margaret, now of age, was taking her money out of the old safe investments and putting it into Foreign Things, which always smash. Silence would have been criminal. Her own fortune was invested in Home Rails, and most ardently did she beg her niece to imitate her. 'Then we should be together, dear.' Margaret, out of politeness, invested a few hundreds in the Nottingham and Derby Railway, and though the Foreign Things did admirably and the Nottingham and Derby declined with the steady dignity of which only Home Rails are capable, Mrs Munt never ceased to rejoice, and to say, 'I did manage that, at all events. When the smash comes poor Margaret will have a nest-egg to fall back upon.' This year Helen came of age, and exactly the same thing happened in Helen's case; she also would shift her money out of Consols, but

she, too, almost without being pressed, consecrated a fraction of it to the Nottingham and Derby Railway. So far so good, but in social matters their aunt had accomplished nothing. Sooner or later the girls would enter on the process known as throwing themselves away, and if they had delayed hitherto, it was only that they might throw themselves more vehemently in the future. They saw too many people at Wickham Place – unshaven musicians, an actress even, German cousins (one knows what foreigners are), acquaintances picked up at Continental hotels (one knows what they are too). It was interesting, and down at Swanage no one appreciated culture more than Mrs Munt; but it was dangerous, and disaster was bound to come. How right she was, and how lucky to be on the spot when the disaster came!

The train sped northward, under innumerable tunnels. It was only an hour's journey, but Mrs Munt had to raise and lower the window again and again. She passed through the South Welwyn Tunnel, saw light for a moment, and entered the North Welwyn Tunnel, of tragic fame. She traversed the immense viaduct, whose arches span untroubled meadows and the dreamy flow of Tewin Water. She skirted the parks of politicians. At times the Great North Road accompanied her, more suggestive of infinity than any railway, awakening, after a nap of a hundred years, to such life as is conferred by the stench of motor-cars, and to such culture as is implied by the advertisements of antibilious pills. To history, to tragedy, to the past, to the future, Mrs Munt remained equally indifferent; hers but to concentrate on the end of her journey, and to rescue poor Helen from this dreadful mess.

The station for Howards End was at Hilton, one of the large villages that are strung so frequently along the Great North Road, and that owe their size to the traffic of coaching and pre-coaching days. Being near London, it had not shared in the rural decay, and its long High Street had budded out right and left into residential estates. For about a mile a series of tiled and slated houses passed before Mrs Munt's inattentive eyes, a series broken at one point by six Danish

tumuli that stood shoulder to shoulder along the highroad, tombs of soldiers. Beyond these tumuli habitations thickened, and the train came to a standstill in a tangle that was almost a town.

The station, like the scenery, like Helen's letters, struck an indeterminate note. Into which country will it lead, England or Suburbia? It was new, it had island platforms and a subway, and the superficial comfort exacted by business men. But it held hints of local life, personal intercourse, as even Mrs Munt was to discover.

'I want a house,' she confided to the ticket boy. 'It's name is Howards Lodge. Do you know where it is?'

'Mr Wilcox!' the boy called.

A young man in front of them turned round.

'She's wanting Howards End.'

There was nothing for it but to go forward, though Mrs Munt was too much agitated even to stare at the stranger. But remembering that there were two brothers, she had the sense to say to him, 'Excuse me asking, but are you the younger Mr Wilcox or the elder?'

'The younger. Can I do anything for you?'

'Oh, well' – she controlled herself with difficulty. 'Really. Are you? I –' She moved away from the ticket boy and lowered her voice. 'I am Miss Schlegel's aunt. I ought to introduce myself, oughtn't I? My name is Mrs Munt.'

She was conscious that he raised his cap and said quite coolly, 'Oh, rather; Miss Schlegel is stopping with us. Did you want to see her?'

'Possibly –'

'I'll call you a cab. No; wait a mo.' He thought. 'Our motor's here. I'll run you up in it.'

'That is very kind –'

'Not at all, if you'll just wait till they bring out a parcel from the office. This way.'

'My niece is not with you by any chance?'

'No; I came over with my father. He has gone on north in your train. You'll see Miss Schlegel at lunch. You're coming up to lunch, I hope?'

'I should like to come *up*,' said Mrs Munt, not committing

herself to nourishment until she had studied Helen's lover a little more. He seemed a gentleman, but had so rattled her round that her powers of observation were numbed. She glanced at him stealthily. To a feminine eye there was nothing amiss in the sharp depressions at the corners of his mouth, nor in the rather box-like construction of his forehead. He was dark, clean-shaven, and seemed accustomed to command.

'In front or behind? Which do you prefer? It may be windy in front.'

'In front if I may; then we can talk.'

'But excuse me one moment – I can't think what they're doing with that parcel.' He strode into the booking-office and called with a new voice: 'Hi, hi, you there! Are you going to keep me waiting all day? Parcel for Wilcox, Howards End. Just look sharp!' Emerging, he said in quieter tones: 'This station's abominably organized; if I had my way, the whole lot of 'em should get the sack. May I help you in?'

'This is very good of you,' said Mrs Munt, as she settled herself into a luxurious cavern of red leather, and suffered her person to be padded with rugs and shawls. She was more civil than she had intended, but really this young man was very kind. Moreover, she was a little afraid of him; his self-possession was extraordinary. 'Very good indeed,' she repeated, adding: 'It is just what I should have wished.'

'Very good of you to say so,' he replied, with a slight look of surprise, which, like most slight looks, escaped Mrs Munt's attention. 'I was just tooling my father over to catch the down train.'

'You see, we heard from Helen this morning.'

Young Wilcox was pouring in petrol, starting his engine, and performing other actions with which this story has no concern. The great car began to rock, and the form of Mrs Munt, trying to explain things, sprang agreeably up and down among the red cushions. 'The mater will be very glad to see you,' he mumbled. 'Hi! I say. Parcel. Parcel for Howards End. Bring it out. Hi!'

A bearded porter emerged with the parcel in one hand

and an entry book in the other. With the gathering whir of the motor these ejaculations mingled: 'Sign, must I? Why the – should I sign after all this bother? Not even got a pencil on you? Remember next time I report you to the stationmaster. My time's of value, though yours mayn't be. Here' – here being a tip.

'Extremely sorry, Mrs Munt.'

'Not at all, Mr Wilcox.'

'And do you object to going through the village? It is rather a longer spin, but I have one or two commissions.'

'I should love going through the village. Naturally I am very anxious to talk things over with you.'

As she said this she felt ashamed, for she was disobeying Margaret's instructions. Only disobeying them in the letter, surely. Margaret had only warned her against discussing the incident with outsiders. Surely it was not 'uncivilized or wrong' to discuss it with the young man himself, since chance had thrown them together.

A reticent fellow, he made no reply. Mounting by her side, he put on gloves and spectacles, and they drove off, the bearded porter – life is a mysterious business – looking after them with admiration.

The wind was in their faces down the station road, blowing the dust into Mrs Munt's eyes. But as soon as they turned into the Great North Road she opened fire. 'You can well imagine,' she said, 'that the news was a great shock to us.'

'What news?'

'Mr Wilcox,' she said frankly, 'Margaret has told me everything – everything. I have seen Helen's letter.'

He could not look her in the face, as his eyes were fixed on his work; he was travelling as quickly as he dared down the High Street. But he inclined his head in her direction, and said, 'I beg your pardon; I didn't catch.'

'About Helen. Helen, of course. Helen is a very exceptional person – I am sure you will let me say this, feeling towards her as you do – indeed, all the Schlegels are exceptional. I come in no spirit of interference, but it was a great shock.'

They drew up opposite a draper's. Without replying, he turned round in his seat, and contemplated the cloud of dust that they had raised in their passage through the village. It was settling again, but not all into the road from which he had taken it. Some of it had percolated through the open windows, some had whitened the roses and gooseberries of the wayside gardens, while a certain proportion had entered the lungs of the villagers. 'I wonder when they'll learn wisdom and tar the roads,' was his comment. Then a man ran out of the draper's with a roll of oilcloth, and off they went again.

'Margaret could not come herself, on account of poor Tibby, so I am here to represent her and to have a good talk.'

'I'm sorry to be so dense,' said the young man, again drawing up outside a shop. 'But I still haven't quite understood.'

'Helen, Mr Wilcox – my niece and you.'

He pushed up his goggles and gazed at her, absolutely bewildered. Horror smote her to the heart, for even she began to suspect that they were at cross-purposes, and that she had commenced her mission by some hideous blunder.

'Miss Schlegel and myself?' he asked, compressing his lips.

'I trust there has been no misunderstanding,' quavered Mrs Munt. 'Her letter certainly read that way.'

'What way?'

'That you and she – ' She paused, then drooped her eyelids.

'I think I catch your meaning,' he said stickily. 'What an extraordinary mistake!'

'Then you didn't the least – ' she stammered, getting blood-red in the face, and wishing she had never been born.

'Scarcely, as I am already engaged to another lady.' There was a moment's silence, and then he caught his breath and exploded with, 'Oh, good God! Don't tell me it's some silliness of Paul's.'

'But you are Paul.'

'I'm not.'

'Then why did you say so at the station?'

'I said nothing of the sort.'

'I beg your pardon, you did.'

'I beg your pardon, I did not. My name is Charles.'

'Younger' may mean son as opposed to father, or secon brother as opposed to first. There is much to be said f either view, and later on they said it. But they had oth questions before them now.

'Do you mean to tell me that Paul –'

But she did not like his voice. He sounded as if he w talking to a porter, and, certain that he had deceived her the station, she too grew angry.

'Do you mean to tell me that Paul and your niece –

Mrs Munt – such is human nature – determined that sh would champion the lovers. She was not going to be bullie by a severe young man. 'Yes, they care for one another ve much indeed,' she said. 'I dare say they will tell you abo it by-and-by. We heard this morning.'

And Charles clenched his fist and cried, 'The idiot, th idiot, the little fool!'

Mrs Munt tried to divest herself of her rugs. 'If that your attitude, Mr Wilcox, I prefer to walk.'

'I beg you will do no such thing. I will take you up th moment to the house. Let me tell you the thing's impo sible, and must be stopped.'

Mrs Munt did not often lose her temper, and when sh did it was only to protect those whom she loved. On th occasion she blazed out. 'I quite agree, sir. The thing impossible, and I will come up and stop it. My niece is very exceptional person, and I am not inclined to sit st while she throws herself away on those who will n appreciate her.'

Charles worked his jaws.

'Considering she has only known your brother sin Wednesday, and only met your father and mother at stray hotel –'

'Could you possibly lower your voice? The shopman w overhear.'

'*Esprit de classe*' – if one may coin the phrase – was strong in Mrs Munt. She sat quivering while a member of the lower orders deposited a metal funnel, a saucepan, and a garden squirt beside the roll of oilcloth.

'Right behind?'

'Yes, sir.' And the lower orders vanished in a cloud of dust.

'I warn you: Paul hasn't a penny; it's useless.'

'No need to warn us, Mr Wilcox, I assure you. The warning is all the other way. My niece has been very foolish, and I shall give her a good scolding and take her back to London with me.'

'He has to make his way out in Nigeria. He couldn't think of marrying for years, and when he does it must be a woman who can stand the climate, and is in other ways – Why hasn't he told us? Of course he's ashamed. He knows he's been a fool. And so he has – a damned fool.'

She grew furious.

'Whereas Miss Schlegel has lost no time in publishing the news.'

'If I were a man, Mr Wilcox, for that last remark I'd box your ears. You're not fit to clean my niece's boots, to sit in the same room with her, and you dare – you actually dare – I decline to argue with such a person.'

'All I know is, she's spread the thing and he hasn't, and my father's away and I – '

'And all that I know is – '

'Might I finish my sentence, please?'

'No.'

Charles clenched his teeth and sent the motor swerving all over the lane.

She screamed.

So they played the game of Capping Families, a round of which is always played when love would unite two members of our race. But they played it with unusual vigour, stating in so many words that Schlegels were better than Wilcoxes, Wilcoxes better than Schlegels. They flung decency aside. The man was young, the woman deeply stirred; in both a vein of coarseness was latent. Their

quarrel was no more surprising than are most quarrels inevitable at the time, incredible afterwards. But it w more than usually futile. A few minutes, and they we enlightened. The motor drew up at Howards End, a Helen, looking very pale, ran out to meet her aunt.

'Aunt Juley, I have just had a telegram from Margar I – I meant to stop your coming. It isn't – it's over.'

The climax was too much for Mrs Munt. She burst in tears.

'Aunt Juley dear, don't. Don't let them know I've be so silly. It wasn't anything. Do bear up for my sake.'

'Paul,' cried Charles Wilcox, pulling his gloves off.

'Don't let them know. They are never to know.'

'Oh, my darling Helen – '

'Paul! Paul!'

A very young man came out of the house.

'Paul, is there any truth in this?'

'I didn't – I don't – '

'Yes or no, man; plain question, plain answer. Did didn't Miss Schlegel – '

'Charles dear,' said a voice from the garden. 'Charl dear Charles, one doesn't ask plain questions. There aren such things.'

They were all silent. It was Mrs Wilcox.

She approached just as Helen's letter had described he trailing noiselessly over the lawn, and there was actually wisp of hay in her hands. She seemed to belong not to t young people and their motor, but to the house, and to t tree that overshadowed it. One knew that she worshipp the past, and that the instinctive wisdom the past can alo bestow had descended upon her – that wisdom to which v give the clumsy name of aristocracy. High born she mig not be. But assuredly she cared about her ancestors, and l them help her. When she saw Charles angry, Paul frigh ened, and Mrs Munt in tears, she heard her ancestors sa 'Separate those human beings who will hurt each oth most. The rest can wait.' So she did not ask questions. St less did she pretend that nothing had happened, as competent society hostess would have done. She said. 'M

Schlegel, would you take you aunt up to your room or to my room, whichever you think best. Paul, do find Evie, and tell her lunch for six, but I'm not sure whether we shall all be downstairs for it.' And when they had obeyed her, she turned to her elder son, who stood still in the throbbing, stinking car, and smiled at him with tenderness, and without saying a word, turned away from him towards her flowers.

'Mother,' he called, 'are you aware that Paul has been playing the fool again?'

'It is all right, dear. They have broken off the engagement.'

'Engagement – !'

'They do not love any longer, if you prefer it put that way,' said Mrs Wilcox, stooping down to smell a rose.

CHAPTER IV

HELEN and her aunt returned to Wickham Place in a state of collapse, and for a little time Margaret had three invalids on her hands. Mrs Munt soon recovered. She possessed to a remarkable degree the power of distorting the past, and before many days were over she had forgotten the part played by her own imprudence in the catastrophe. Even at the crisis she had cried, 'Thank goodness, poor Margaret is saved this!' which during the journey to London evolved into, 'It had to be gone through by someone,' which in its turn ripened into the permanent form of 'The one time I really did help Emily's girls was over the Wilcox business.' But Helen was a more serious patient. New ideas had burst upon her like a thunder clap, and by them and by their reverberations she had been stunned.

The truth was that she had fallen in love, not with an individual, but with a family.

Before Paul arrived she had, as it were, been tuned up into his key. The energy of the Wilcoxes had fascinated her, had created new images of beauty in her responsive mind. To be all day with them in the open air, to sleep at night

under their roof, had seemed the supreme joy of life, and had led to that abandonment of personality that is a possible prelude to love. She had liked giving in to Mr Wilcox, or Evie, or Charles; she had liked being told that her notions of life were sheltered or academic; that Equality was nonsense, Votes for Women nonsense, Socialism nonsense, Art and Literature, except when conducive to strengthening the character, nonsense. One by one the Schlegel fetishes had been overthrown, and, though professing to defend them, she had rejoiced. When Mr Wilcox said that one sound man of business did more good to the world than a dozen of your social reformers, she had swallowed the curious assertion without a gasp, and had leant back luxuriously among the cushions of his motor-car. When Charles said, 'Why be so polite to servants? they don't understand it,' she had not given the Schlegel retort of, 'If they don't understand it, I do.' No; she had vowed to be less polite to servants in the future. 'I am swathed in cant,' she thought, 'and it is good for me to be stripped of it.' And all that she thought or did or breathed was a quiet preparation for Paul. Paul was inevitable. Charles was taken up with another girl, Mr Wilcox was so old, Evie so young, Mrs Wilcox so different. Round the absent brother she began to throw the halo of Romance, to irradiate him with all the splendour of those happy days, to feel that in him she should draw nearest to the robust ideal. He and she were about the same age, Evie said. Most people thought Paul handsomer than his brother. He was certainly a better shot, though not so good at golf. And when Paul appeared, flushed with the triumph of getting through an examination, and ready to flirt with any pretty girl, Helen met him halfway, or more than halfway, and turned towards him on the Sunday evening.

He had been talking of his approaching exile in Nigeria, and he should have continued to talk of it, and allowed their guest to recover. But the heave of her bosom flattered him. Passion was possible, and he became passionate. Deep down in him something whispered. 'This girl would let you kiss her; you might not have such a chance again.'

That was 'how it happened', or, rather, how Helen described it to her sister, using words even more unsympathetic than my own. But the poetry of that kiss, the wonder of it, the magic that there was in life for hours after it – who can describe that? It is so easy for an Englishman to sneer at these chance collisions of human beings. To the insular cynic and the insular moralist they offer an equal opportunity. It is so easy to talk of 'passing emotion', and to forget how vivid the emotion was ere it passed. Our impulse to sneer, to forget, is at root a good one. We recognize that emotion is not enough, and that men and women are personalities capable of sustained relations, not mere opportunities for an electrical discharge. Yet we rate the impulse too highly. We do not admit that by collisions of this trivial sort the doors of heaven may be shaken open. To Helen, at all events, her life was to bring nothing more intense than the embrace of this boy who played no part in it. He had drawn her out of the house, where there was danger of surprise and light; he had led her by a path he knew, until they stood under the column of the vast wych-elm. A man in the darkness, he had whispered 'I love you' when she was desiring love. In time his slender personality faded, the scene that he had evoked endured. In all the variable years that followed she never saw the like of it again.

'I understand,' said Margaret – 'at least, I understand as much as ever is understood of these things. Tell me now what happened on the Monday morning.'

'It was over at once.'

'How, Helen?'

'I was still happy while I dressed, but as I came downstairs I got nervous, and when I went into the dining-room I knew it was no good. There was Evie – I can't explain – managing the tea-urn, and Mr Wilcox reading *The Times*.'

'Was Paul there?'

'Yes; and Charles was talking to him about Stocks and Shares, and he looked frightened.'

By slight indications the sisters could convey much to each other. Margaret saw horror latent in the scene, and Helen's next remark did not surprise her.

‘Somehow, when that kind of man looks frightened it too awful. It is all right for us to be frightened, or for me of another sort – father, for instance; but for men like tha When I saw all the others so placid, and Paul mad wit terror in case I said the wrong thing, I felt for a momen that the whole Wilcox family was a fraud, just a wall newspapers and motor-cars and golf-clubs, and that if fell I should find nothing behind it but panic and empt ness.’

‘I don’t think that. The Wilcoxes struck me as bein genuine people, particularly the wife.’

‘No, I don’t really think that. But Paul was so broad shouldered; all kinds of extraordinary things made worse, and I knew that it would never do – never. I said t him after breakfast, when the others were practising stroke “We rather lost our heads,” and he looked better at once though frightfully ashamed. He began a speech abou having no money to marry on, but it hurt him to make it and I stopped him. Then he said, “I must beg your pardo over this, Miss Schlegel; I can’t think what came over m last night.” And I said, “Nor what over me; never mind.” And then we parted – at least, until I remembered that had written straight off to tell you the night before, an that frightened him again. I asked him to send a telegran for me, for he knew you would be coming or something and he tried to get hold of the motor, but Charles and M Wilcox wanted it to go to the station; and Charles offere to send the telegram for me, and then I had to say that th telegram was of no consequence, for Paul and Charle might read it, and though I wrote it out several times, h always said people would suspect something. He took i himself at last, pretending that he must walk down to ge cartridges, and, what with one thing and the other, it wa not handed in at the Post Office until too late. It was th most terrible morning. Paul disliked me more and more and Evie talked cricket averages till I nearly screamed. cannot think how I stood her all the other days. At las Charles and his father started for the station, and the came your telegram warning me that Aunt Juley wa

coming by that train and Paul – oh, rather horrible – said that I had muddled it. But Mrs Wilcox knew.'

'Knew what?'

'Everything; though we neither of us told her a word, and had known all along, I think.'

'Oh, she must have overheard you.'

'I suppose so, but it seemed wonderful. When Charles and Aunt Juley drove up, calling each other names, Mrs Wilcox stepped in from the garden and made everything less terrible. Ugh! but it has been a disgusting business. To think that –' She sighed.

'To think that because you and a young man meet for a moment, there must be all these telegrams and anger,' supplied Margaret.

Helen nodded.

'I've often thought about it, Helen. It's one of the most interesting things in the world. The truth is that there is a great outer life that you and I have never touched – a life in which telegrams and anger count. Personal relations, that we think supreme, are not supreme there. There love means marriage settlements, death, death duties. So far I'm clear. But here my difficulty. This outer life, though obviously horrid, often seems the real one – there's grit in it. It does breed character. Do personal relations lead to sloppiness in the end?'

'Oh, Meg, that's what I felt, only not so clearly, when the Wilcoxes were so competent, and seemed to have their hands on all the ropes.'

'Don't you feel it now?'

'I remember Paul at breakfast,' said Helen quietly. 'I shall never forget him. He had nothing to fall back upon. I know that personal relations are the real life, for ever and ever.'

'Amen!'

So the Wilcox episode fell into the background, leaving behind it memories of sweetness and horror that mingled, and the sisters pursued the life that Helen had commended. They talked to each other and to other people, they filled the tall thin house at Wickham Place with those whom they

liked or could befriend. They even attended public meetings. In their own fashion they cared deeply about politics, though not as politicians would have us care; they desired that public life should mirror whatever is good in the life within. Temperance, tolerance, and sexual equality were intelligible cries to them; whereas they did not follow our Forward Policy in Tibet with the keen attention that it merits, and would at times dismiss the whole British Empire with a puzzled, if reverent, sigh. Not out of them are the shows of history erected: the world would be a grey bloodless place were it entirely composed of Miss Schlegels. But the world being what it is, perhaps they shine out in it like stars.

A word on their origin. They were not 'English to the backbone', as their aunt had piously asserted. But, on the other hand, they were not 'Germans of the dreadful sort'. Their father had belonged to a type that was more prominent in Germany fifty years ago than now. He was not the aggressive German, so dear to the English journalist, nor the domestic German, so dear to the English wit. If one classed him at all it would be as the countryman of Hegel and Kant, as the idealist, inclined to be dreamy, whose Imperialism was the Imperialism of the air. Not that his life had been inactive. He had fought like blazes against Denmark, Austria, France. But he had fought without visualizing the results of victory. A hint of the truth broke on him after Sedan, when he saw the dyed moustaches of Napoleon going grey; another when he entered Paris, and saw the smashed windows of the Tuileries. Peace came – it was all very immense, one had turned into an Empire – but he knew that some quality had vanished for which not all Alsace-Lorraine could compensate him. Germany a commercial Power, Germany a naval Power, Germany with colonies here and a Forward Policy there, and legitimate aspirations in the other place, might appeal to others, and be fitly served by them; for his own part, he abstained from the fruits of victory, and naturalized himself in England. The more earnest members of his family never forgave him, and knew that his children, though scarcely English of the

dreadful sort, would never be German to the backbone. He had obtained work in one of our provincial Universities, and there married poor Emily (or Die Engländerin, as the case may be), and as she had money, they proceeded to London, and came to know a good many people. But his gaze was always fixed beyond the sea. It was his hope that the clouds of materialism obscuring the Fatherland would part in time, and the mild intellectual light re-emerge. 'Do you imply that we Germans are stupid, Uncle Ernst?' exclaimed a haughty and magnificent nephew. Uncle Ernst replied, 'To my mind. You see the intellect, but you no longer care about it. That I call stupidity.' As the haughty nephew did not follow, he continued, 'You only care about the things that you can use, and therefore arrange them in the following order: money, supremely useful; intellect, rather useful; imagination, of no use at all. No' – for the other had protested – 'your Pan-Germanism is no more imaginative than is our Imperialism over here. It is the vice of a vulgar mind to be thrilled by bigness, to think that a thousand square miles are a thousand times more wonderful than one square mile, and that a million square miles are almost the same as heaven. That is not imagination. No, it kills it. When their poets over here try to celebrate bigness they are dead at once, and naturally. Your poets too are dying, your philosophers, your musicians to whom Europe has listened for two hundred years. Gone. Gone with the little courts that nurtured them – gone with Esterhaz and Weimar. What? What's that? Your Universities? Oh yes, you have learned men, who collect more facts than do the learned men of England. They collect facts, and facts, and empires of facts. But which of them will rekindle the light within?'

To all this Margaret listened, sitting on the haughty nephew's knee.

It was a unique education for the little girls. The haughty nephew would be at Wickham Place one day, bringing with him an even haughtier wife, both convinced that Germany was appointed by God to govern the world. Aunt Juley would come the next day, convinced that Great

Britain had been appointed to the same post by the same authority. Were both these loud-voiced parties right? On one occasion they had met, and Margaret with clasped hands had implored them to argue the subject out in her presence. Whereat they blushed, and began to talk about the weather. 'Papa,' she cried – she was a most offensive child – 'why will they not discuss this most clear question?' Her father, surveying the parties grimly replied that he did not know. Putting her head on one side, Margaret then remarked, 'To me one of two things is very clear; either God does not know His own mind about England and Germany, or else these do not know the mind of God.' A hateful little girl, but at thirteen she had grasped a dilemma that most people travel through life without perceiving. Her brain darted up and down; it grew pliant and strong. Her conclusion was, that any human being lies nearer to the unseen than any organization, and from this she never varied.

Helen advanced along the same lines, though with a more irresponsible tread. In character she resembled her sister, but she was pretty, and so apt to have a more amusing time. People gathered round her more readily, especially when they were new acquaintances, and she did enjoy a little homage very much. When their father died and they ruled alone at Wickham Place, she often absorbed the whole of the company, while Margaret – both were tremendous talkers – fell flat. Neither sister bothered about this. Helen never apologized afterwards, Margaret did not feel the slightest rancour. But looks have their influence upon character. The sisters were alike as little girls, but at the time of the Wilcox episode their methods were beginning to diverge; the younger was rather apt to entice people, and, in enticing them, to be herself enticed; the elder went straight ahead, and accepted an occasional failure as part of the game.

Little need be premised about Tibby. He was now an intelligent man of sixteen, but dyspeptic and difficile.

CHAPTER V

It will be generally admitted that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man. All sorts and conditions are satisfied by it. Whether you are like Mrs Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come – of course, not so as to disturb the others – or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music's flood; or like Margaret, who can only see the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee; or like their cousin, Fräulein Mosebach, who remembers all the time that Beethoven is 'echt Deutsch'; or like Fräulein Mosebach's young man, who can remember nothing but Fräulein Mosebach: in any case, the passion of your life becomes more vivid, and you are bound to admit that such a noise is cheap at two shillings. It is cheap, even if you hear it in the Queen's Hall, dreariest music-room in London, though not as dreary as the Free Trade Hall, Manchester; and even if you sit on the extreme left of the hall, so that the brass bumps at you before the rest of the orchestra arrives, it is still cheap.

'Who is Margaret talking to?' said Mrs Munt, at the conclusion of the first movement. She was again in London on a visit to Wickham Place.

Helen looked down the long line of their party, and said that she did not know.

'Would it be some young man or other whom she takes an interest in?'

'I expect so,' Helen replied. Music enwrapped her, and she could not enter into the distinction that divides young men whom one takes an interest in from young men whom one knows.

'You girls are so wonderful in always having – Oh dear! one mustn't talk.'

For the Andante had begun – very beautiful, but bearing a family likeness to all the other beautiful Andantes that

Beethoven had written, and, to Helen's mind, rather d
connecting the heroes and shipwrecks of the first moveme
from the heroes and goblins of the third. She heard t
tune through once, and then her attention wandered, a
she gazed at the audience, or the organ, or the architectu
Much did she censure the attenuated Cupids who encirc
the ceiling of the Queen's Hall, inclining each to each wi
vapid gesture, and clad in sallow pantaloons, on which t
October sunlight struck. 'How awful to marry a man li
those Cupids!' thought Helen. Here Beethoven starte
decorating his tune, so she heard him through once mo
and then smiled at her cousin Frieda. But Frieda, listeni
to Classical Music, could not respond. Herr Leisecke, to
looked as if wild horses could not make him inattentiv
there were lines across his forehead, his lips were parted, h
pince-nez at right angles to his nose, and he had laid
thick, white hand on either knee. And next to her was Au
Juley, so British, and wanting to tap. How interesting th
row of people was! What diverse influences had gone to t
making! Here Beethoven, after humming and hawing wit
great sweetness, said 'Heigho', and the Andante came to a
end. Applause, and a round of 'wunderschöning' an
'pracht' volleying from the German contingent. Margar
started talking to her new young man; Helen said to h
aunt: 'Now comes the wonderful movement: first of all th
goblins, and then a trio of elephants dancing'; and Tibb
implored the company generally to look out for the trans
tional passage on the drum.

'On the what, dear?'

'On the *drum*, Aunt Juley.'

'No; look out for the part where you think you have don
with the goblins and they come back,' breathed Helen,
the music started with a goblin walking quietly over th
universe, from end to end. Others followed him. They we
not aggressive creatures; it was that that made them
terrible to Helen. They merely observed in passing th
there was no such thing as splendour or heroism in th
world. After the interlude of elephants dancing, the
returned and made the observation for the second tim

Helen could not contradict them, for, once at all events, she had felt the same, and had seen the reliable walls of youth collapse. Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! The goblins were right.

Her brother raised his finger: it was the transitional passage on the drum.

For, as if things were going too far, Beethoven took hold of the goblins and made them do what he wanted. He appeared in person. He gave them a little push, and they began to walk in major key instead of in a minor, and then – he blew with his mouth and they were scattered! Gusts of splendour, gods and demi-gods contending with vast swords, colour and fragrance broadcast on the field of battle, magnificent victory, magnificent death! Oh, it all burst before the girl, and she even stretched out her gloved hands as if it was tangible. Any fate was titanic; any contest desirable; conqueror and conquered would alike be applauded by the angels of the utmost stars.

And the goblins – they had not really been there at all? They were only the phantoms of cowardice and unbelief? One healthy human impulse would dispel them? Men like the Wilcoxes, or President Roosevelt, would say yes. Beethoven knew better. The goblins really had been there. They might return – and they did. It was as if the splendour of life might boil over and waste to steam and froth. In its dissolution one heard the terrible, ominous note, and a goblin, with increased malignity, walked quietly over the universe from end to end. Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! Even the flaming ramparts of the world might fall.

Beethoven chose to make all right in the end. He built the ramparts up. He blew with his mouth for the second time, and again the goblins were scattered. He brought back the gusts of splendour, the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and of death, and, amid vast roarings of a superhuman joy, he led his Fifth Symphony to its conclusion. But the goblins were there. They could return. He had said so bravely, and that is why one can trust Beethoven when he says other things.

Helen pushed her way out during the applause. She desired to be alone. The music had summed up to her all that had happened or could happen in her career. She read it as a tangible statement, which could never be superseded. The notes meant this and that to her, and they could have no other meaning, and life could have no other meaning. She pushed right out of the building, and walked slowly down the outside staircase, breathing the autumnal air, and then she strolled home.

'Margaret,' called Mrs Munt, 'is Helen all right?'

'Oh yes.'

'She is always going away in the middle of a programme,' said Tibby.

'The music has evidently moved her deeply,' said Fräulein Mosebach.

'Excuse me,' said Margaret's young man, who had for some time been preparing a sentence, 'but that lady has, quite inadvertently, taken my umbrella.'

'Oh, good gracious me! – I am so sorry. Tibby, run after Helen.'

'I shall miss the Four Serious Songs if I do.'

'Tibby love, you must go.'

'It isn't of any consequence,' said the young man, in truth a little uneasy about his umbrella.

'But of course it is. Tibby! Tibby!'

Tibby rose to his feet, and wilfully caught his person on the backs of the chairs. By the time he had tipped up the seat and had found his hat, and had deposited his full score in safety, it was 'too late' to go after Helen. The Four Serious Songs had begun, and one could not move during their performance.

'My sister is so careless,' whispered Margaret.

'Not at all,' replied the young man; but his voice was dead and cold.

'If you would give me your address –'

'Oh, not at all, not at all'; and he wrapped his greatcoat over his knees.

Then the Four Serious Songs rang shallow in Margaret's ears. Brahms, for all his grumbling and grizzling, had

never guessed what it felt like to be suspected of stealing an umbrella. For this fool of a young man thought that she and Helen and Tibby had been playing the confidence trick on him, and that if he gave his address they would break into his rooms some midnight or other and steal his walking-stick too. Most ladies would have laughed, but Margaret really minded, for it gave her a glimpse into squalor. To trust people is a luxury in which only the wealthy can indulge; the poor cannot afford it. As soon as Brahms had grunted himself out, she gave him her card and said, 'That is where we live; if you preferred, you could call for the umbrella after the concert, but I didn't like to trouble you when it has all been our fault.'

His face brightened a little when he saw that Wickham Place was W. It was sad to see him corroded with suspicion, and yet not daring to be impolite, in case these well-dressed people were honest after all. She took it as a good sign that he said to her, 'It's a fine programme this afternoon, is it not?' for this was the remark with which he had originally opened, before the umbrella intervened.

'The Beethoven's fine,' said Margaret, who was not a female of the encouraging type. 'I don't like the Brahms, though, nor the Mendelssohn that came first – and ugh! I don't like this Elgar that's coming.'

'What, what?' called Herr Liesecke, overhearing. 'The "Pomp and Circumstance" will not be fine?'

'Oh, Margaret, you tiresome girl!' cried her aunt. 'Here have I been persuading Herr Liesecke to stop for "Pomp and Circumstance", and you are undoing all my work. I am so anxious for him to hear what *we* are doing in music. Oh, you mustn't run down our English composers, Margaret.'

'For my part, I have heard the composition at Stettin,' said Fräulein Mosebach. 'On two occasions. It is dramatic, a little.'

'Frieda, you despise English music. You know you do. And English art. And English literature, except Shakespeare and he's a German. Very well, Frieda, you may go.'

The lovers laughed and glanced at each other. Moved by

a common impulse, they rose to their feet and fled from 'Pomp and Circumstance'.

'We have this call to pay in Finsbury Circus, it is true,' said Herr Liesecke, as he edged past her and reached the gangway just as the music started.

'Margaret – ' loudly whispered by Aunt Juley. 'Margaret, Margaret! Fräulein Mosebach has left her beautiful little bag behind her on the seat.'

Sure enough, there was Frieda's reticule, containing her address book, her pocket dictionary, her map of London, and her money.

'Oh, what a bother – what a family we are! Fr – frieda!'

'Hush!' said all those who thought the music fine.

'But it's the number they want in Finsbury Circus – '

'Might I – couldn't I – ' said the suspicious young man, and got very red.

'Oh, I would be so grateful.'

He took the bag – money clinking inside it – and slipped up the gangway with it. He was just in time to catch them at the swing-door, and he received a pretty smile from the German girl and a fine bow from her cavalier. He returned to his seat upsides with the world. The trust that they had reposed in him was trivial, but he felt that it cancelled his mistrust for them, and that probably he would not be 'had' over his umbrella. This young man had been 'had' in the past – badly, perhaps overwhelmingly – and now most of his energies went in defending himself against the unknown. But this afternoon – perhaps on account of music – he perceived that one must slack off occasionally, or what is the good of being alive? Wickham Place, W., though a risk, was as safe as most things, and he would risk it.

So when the concert was over and Margaret said, 'We live quite near; I am going there now. Could you walk round with me, and we'll find your umbrella?' he said, 'Thank you,' peaceably, and followed her out of the Queen's Hall. She wished that he was not so anxious to hand a lady downstairs, or to carry a lady's programme for her – his class was near enough her own for its manners to vex her. But she found him interesting on the whole – everyone

interested the Schlegels on the whole at that time – and while her lips talked culture, her heart was planning to invite him to tea.

'How tired one gets after music!' she began.

'Do you find the atmosphere of Queen's Hall oppressive?'

'Yes, horribly.'

'But surely the atmosphere of Covent Garden is even more oppressive.'

'Do you go there much?'

'When my work permits, I attend the gallery for the Royal Opera.'

Helen would have exclaimed, 'So do I. I love the gallery,' and thus have endeared herself to the young man. Helen could do these things. But Margaret had an almost morbid horror of 'drawing people out', of 'making things go'. She had been to the gallery at Covent Garden, but she did not 'attend' it, preferring the more expensive seats; still less did she love it. So she made no reply.

'This year I have been three times to "Faust", "Tosca", and – ' Was it 'Tannhouser' or 'Tannhoyser'? Better not risk the word.

Margaret disliked 'Tosca' and 'Faust'. And so, for one reason and another, they walked on in silence, chaperoned by the voice of Mrs Munt, who was getting into difficulties with her nephew.

'I do in a *way* remember the passage, Tibby, but when every instrument is so beautiful, it is difficult to pick out one thing rather than another. I am sure that you and Helen take me to the very nicest concerts. Not a dull note from beginning to end. I only wish that our German friends would have stayed till it finished.'

'But surely you haven't forgotten the drum steadily beating on the low C, Aunt Juley?' came Tibby's voice. 'No one could. It's unmistakable.'

'A specially loud part?' hazarded Mrs Munt. 'Of course I do not go in for being musical,' she added, the shot failing. 'I only care for music – a very different thing. But still I will say this for myself – I do know when I like a thing and when I don't. Some people are the same about pictures. They can

go into a picture gallery – Miss Conder can – and sa
straight off what they feel, all round the wall. I never coul
do that. But music is so different to pictures, to my mind
When it comes to music I am as safe as houses, and
assure you, Tibby, I am by no means pleased by everything
There was a thing – something about a faun in French
which Helen went into ecstasies over, but I thought it mos
tinkling and superficial, and said so, and I held to my
opinion too.'

'Do you agree?' asked Margaret. 'Do you think music i
so different to pictures?'

'I – I should have thought so, kind of,' he said.

'So should I. Now, my sister declares they're just th
same. We have great arguments over it. She says I'n
dense; I say she's sloppy.' Getting under way, she cried
'Now, doesn't it seem absurd to you? What *is* the good o
the Arts if they're interchangeable? What *is* the good o
the ear if it tells you the same as the eye? Helen's one aim
is to translate tunes into the language of painting, and
pictures into the language of music. It's very ingenious, and
she says several pretty things in the process, but what's
gained, I'd like to know? Oh, it's all rubbish, radically
false. If Monet's really Debussy, and Debussy's really
Monet, neither gentleman is worth his salt – that's my
opinion.'

Evidently these sisters quarrelled.

'Now, this very symphony that we've just been having –
she won't let it alone. She labels it with meanings from star
to finish; turns it into literature. I wonder if the day wil
ever return when music will be treated as music. Yet I don'
know. There's my brother – behind us. He treats music a
music, and oh, my goodness! He makes me angrier thar
anyone, simply furious. With him I daren't even argue.'

An unhappy family, if talented.

'But, of course, the real villain is Wagner. He has done
more than any man in the nineteenth century towards the
muddling of the arts. I do feel that music is in a very seriou
state just now, though extraordinarily interesting. Every
now and then in history there do come these terribl

geniuses, like Wagner, who stir up all the wells of thought at once. For a moment it's splendid. Such a splash as never was. But afterwards – such a lot of mud; and the wells – as it were, they communicate with each other too easily now, and not one of them will run quite clear. That's what Wagner's done.'

Her speeches fluttered away from the young man like birds. If only he could talk like this, he would have caught the world. Oh, to acquire culture! Oh, to pronounce foreign names correctly! Oh, to be well informed, discoursing at ease on every subject that a lady started! But it would take one years. With an hour at lunch and a few shattered hours in the evening, how was it possible to catch up with leisured women, who had been reading steadily from childhood! His brain might be full of names, he might have even heard of Monet and Debussy; the trouble was that he could not string them together into a sentence, he could not make them 'tell', he could not quite forget about his stolen umbrella. Yes, the umbrella was the real trouble. Behind Monet and Debussy the umbrella persisted, with the steady beat of a drum. 'I suppose my umbrella will be all right,' he was thinking. 'I don't really mind about it. I will think about music instead. I suppose my umbrella will be all right.' Earlier in the afternoon he had worried about seats. Ought he to have paid as much as two shillings? Earlier still he had wondered, 'Shall I try to do without a programme?' There had always been something to worry him ever since he could remember, always something that distracted him in the pursuit of beauty. For he did pursue beauty, and therefore, Margaret's speeches did flutter away from him like birds.

Margaret talked ahead, occasionally saying, 'Don't you think so? don't you feel the same?' And once she stopped, and said, 'Oh, do interrupt me!' which terrified him. She did not attract him, though she filled him with awe. Her figure was meagre, her face seemed all teeth and eyes, her references to her sister and her brother were uncharitable. For all her cleverness and culture, she was probably one of those soulless, atheistical women who have been so shown

up by Miss Corelli. It was surprising (and alarming) that she should suddenly say, 'I do hope that you'll come in and have some tea.'

'I do hope that you'll come in and have some tea. We should be so glad. I have dragged you so far out of your way.'

They had arrived at Wickham Place. The sun had set, and the backwater, in deep shadow, was filling with a gentle haze. To the right the fantastic sky-line of the flats towered black against the hues of evening; to the left the older houses raised a square-cut, irregular parapet against the grey. Margaret fumbled for her latchkey. Of course she had forgotten it. So, grasping her umbrella by its ferrule, she leant over the area and tapped at the dining-room window.

'Helen! Let us in!'

'All right,' said a voice.

'You've been taking this gentleman's umbrella.'

'Taken a what?' said Helen, opening the door. 'Oh, what's that? Do come in! How do you do?'

'Helen, you must not be so ramshackly. You took this gentleman's umbrella away from Queen's Hall, and he has had the trouble of coming round for it.'

'Oh, I am so sorry!' cried Helen, all her hair flying. She had pulled off her hat as soon as she returned, and had flung herself into the big dining-room chair. 'I do nothing but steal umbrellas. I am so very sorry! Do come in and choose one. Is yours a hooky or a nobbly? Mine's a nobbly – at least, I *think* it is.'

The light was turned on, and they began to search the hall, Helen, who had abruptly parted with the Fifth Symphony, commenting with shrill little cries.

'Don't you talk, Meg! You stole an old gentleman's silk top-hat. Yes, she did, Aunt Juley. It is a positive fact. She thought it was a muff. Oh, heavens! I've knocked the In and Out card down. Where's Frieda? Tibby, why don't you ever – No, I can't remember what I was going to say. That wasn't it, but do tell the maids to hurry tea up. What about this umbrella?' She opened it. 'No, it's all